

BREAD AND LOVE.

BY NELLIE K. BLISSETT.

"I'll have to tell her to-night," said Jean Modeste.

He swept the last brown folds of a net together, and, rising slowly, hung them on a nail behind the door. He stood for a moment looking round the little broken-down shed, which smelt so strongly of fish and tar. His straight, dark features wore, for once, a look of distaste. The narrow bed in the corner, the wet nets that draped the walls, the old sea chest upon which he had been sitting, the gaudy "Virgin and Child" which his dead mother had pinned long ago beside the tiny window—they were so poor and wretched, these things, after all. And yet, unless he obeyed his father now, even these few poverty-stricken possessions would be his no longer.

He turned away with a sudden, impatient movement, and went out. It was evening, and men were lounging against the low wall of the quay. Snatches of talk and laughter came and went upon the still air. At sea a mist was rising after the heat of the day, like a thin white curtain, which an unseen hand kept moving to and fro.

Jean Modeste strode along the quay in silence. The loungers turned to look at him as he went, and one or two flung a jovial remark after him. He heard the word "wedding" at least twice, and each time his black head went a little higher in the air and his eyes gleamed sullenly. Some one laughed as he passed, and he set his teeth and muttered a curse under his breath. His father had not been long about publishing his victory.

He left the quay and struck through the pines along the shore. Under the red rocks that jutted out in a little promontory into the sea a girl was waiting. He caught the flutter of her dress, the gleam of her hair as she came, and set his teeth again. It was that gleaming mass of hair, so unusual to his southern eyes, which had caught his fancy first when he saw her leaning over the wall of the quay.

She saw him long before he reached her, but she did not come to meet him as she had always done before. Instead, she stood very still, her hands hanging at her sides, only her dress fluttering now and then as the sea air caught it. When at last he came close to her he saw that her face was very pale, her wide soft eyes had a strained look. Even the bright hair that he loved was ruffled and wild, as though she had not cared to smooth it back before she came out.

He held out his hands, but, with a sudden movement, she shrank back. For a moment neither spoke. He stood sullenly before her, his head bent, his eye full of somber fire; a mad anger against her, himself, his father—the whole world—tearing at his heart.

"Oh, Jean," her voice was thin and hoarse, "it isn't true?"

He could not look at her. He tried to find words to answer, but they would not come. Suddenly she turned from him, and, dropping on to a red footstool of rock, covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, Jean!"—he heard the sobs choking her as she spoke—"you promised me—you promised—"

She was still, save for the grief that shook her as she sat there rocking herself to and fro with the dreadful mechanical regularity of despair. He stood before her, mute, sullen, a tall blue figure possessed by all the devils of shame, remorse and passion. Suddenly he dropped on his knees beside her and put his arms round her with a roughness that was almost brutal.

"What does it matter to you?" he said in her ear. "You've got me—not that other. I marry her to please my father; no, not to please him, but because, unless I do it, I'm a beggar. Do you understand? What if I marry her, eh? I love you—you—you—" His voice choked, and he covered the hands he had dragged from her face with kisses. She lifted her pale face and looked at him with wet, wild eyes.

"Why should you care?" he went on. "Do you think I am going to leave you for her?" He laughed a little savage laugh under his breath. "My father may marry me to her if he pleases—he can't chain me to her petticoats, I suppose—eh, little one?" His voice softened curiously. "You're mine—always," he said. She looked at him for an instant longer. Then, shivering a little, she drew her hands from his. The deadly pallor of her face struck him dumb.

"Did you think I was that sort—Jean?" she asked.

He knelt beside her in silence. Reproach could have struck no deeper. It was not anger in her voice—it was surprise; and it cut him like a knife.

"You think I would do—that," she said, slowly, "and yet you say you love me. You marry her for the money she has—and yet you say you love me?"

There was silence again. He hung his head under the gaze of her accusing eyes.

"It's true enough," he said; "I do love you. Do you want to see me begging by the roadside, eh? Is that what you call love?" He laughed angrily. "Love's a fine thing when the sea's smooth," he said, "but it isn't worth dying for, little one. When a man's offered bread in one hand and love in the other—well, he doesn't choose love."

She rose from the rocks and drew her faded skirt away from him. There was a kind of horror in her face. He saw it, and caught at her skirt, missing it.

"Where are you going, eh?" he said, quickly. "What do you mean to do?"

She turned and looked back at him for a second with dull eyes. "I don't know where I'll go," she

said, simply; "I don't know what I'll do."

He sprang to his feet and made a step after her, but the look on her face held him back.

"Not that," she said. "You shall never touch me again. A man doesn't choose love. . . . Go back—to your Bread!"

Jean Modeste sat late that night in the cafe. He was moody and sullen, and received the felicitations of his friends upon his approaching marriage with a singular lack of geniality. The rough jokes proper to the occasion only elicited a growl from him in reply, and at last his fellow fishers let him alone, to drink his wine in peace.

He drank more than was good for him, enough to have made him drunk on any other night. On this however, the strong black stuff left him as it found him a little more sullen and silent, perhaps, but otherwise the same.

More than one curious glance was cast at his gloomy face before the end of the evening. His father met him in the dark inn passage, slouching out to his shed, and glanced at him with a suspicious eye. Black Georges Modeste had never quite made out his silent son.

"You'll go out to the nets at dawn," he said. "Take the old boat, and don't go on to the Camel Rock. It'll be a bit thick out there before morning."

Jean growled some inarticulate response and passed on. He banged the door of the little shed which served him for a bedroom, and stumbled savagely against a pile of baskets. The moonlight was falling brightly through the scrap of window upon the crudely colored Virgin and Child pinned on the wall. His eyes, caught by the gleam of yellow hair under the Madonna's white veil, rested upon the picture for a moment. The gleam of gold, the fair, pale face, struck him with a sudden, unendurable stab of remembrance. Turning from the picture with something between an oath and a sob, he flung himself, face downward, upon the bed.

All night he lay sleepless, racked by a fierce struggle which hurt him as though with some fierce physical pain. Once he half-started up, and sat staring at the moonlight with desperate eyes. No, he could not give her up. He would go to her now and tell her so. He seemed to see himself trudging through the scented woods to the little cabin where she lived with her imbecile grandmother. He stood at her window and tapped, and she came out to him, poor child, as she had come so many a time before. He heard his own voice telling her—he saw the gladness of her face. . . . Then the madness of it all came over him again, and he fell heavily back and lay still.

The stars were growing pale when he rose, groped his way to the door and went out. The air

was cold, a white mist lay across the bay. He shivered once or twice as he unmoored the old boat and pushed off. The mist lay low down, so that the oars, as he rowed, seemed to cut the fog instead of the water, and great drops of moisture grew, as though by some magic process, upon the rolled-up sleeves of his shirt. It was all cold, clammy, ghostly, and inconceivably still. Even the beat of the oars seemed muffled as he headed for the horns of the bay.

He went slowly, hugging the spectral outline of the rocks along the shore. The mist streamed past him in wreaths and trails, like wet smoke. He thought of the Camel Rock, and laughed bitterly to himself in silence.

At last he struggled out between the horns of the little harbor and found his father's nets. They had drifted a little, and most of them were empty. He drew them in, one by one, with only a solitary rouget or rascasse struggling here and there in the folds. One net had drifted further than the rest. He rowed after it slowly, looking up at the veiled outline of the shore.

Somewhere above him, among the pines, was the little cabin, with its brown, sunken roof, its hedge of wild myrtle. Somewhere above him, in the cold mist, was the fair-haired girl he had lost.

He found the corks bobbing up and down upon the still water, and reached out for the net. It was heavy. He leaned far out of the boat to drag it up, and the light vessel heeled over with him until her side lay almost level with the ruffled water as he tugged at the net. He could not understand its weight and swore as he hauled it in.

All at once he sat still, staring before him into the water. A gleam like wet gold began to show through the brown meshes of the net.

Jean Modeste, white and still, made one more effort and hauled the net into the boat. Then he knelt down beside it and began, with a dreadful quietness, to cut the brown meshes away from the body of the girl with yellow hair.

She was quite dead. He knelt at the bottom of the boat, and held her wet, fair head against his breast. He had had his choice, and he had chosen Bread, and Love—Love, and Bread. He looked down, shuddering. This was his choice—this.

Suddenly a puff of air tore through the fog, and lifted it high above the drifting boat. A red light showed in the sky—the wind had risen with the sun.

Every instant the wind grew, and light spray dashed across the boat; out of the morning fog a dark shape began to loom.

Jean Modeste, seeing it, lifted his bowed head. A moment more and he had sprung to his feet and was hoisting the huge red sail. Then he sat down again and took the dead girl in his arms. It was

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